

Conference to commemorate 70 years of the United Nations

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REMARKS

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I'd like to thank the Minister and other distinguished representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for this excellent initiative and your kind invitation. Thank you also [Minister and Permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations in New York] for your own thoughts and views on 2015, which is indeed an important year for the United Nations and Hungary.

It is a year to reflect on many remarkable successes and of course to take measures in those areas where we performed less well. But above all it is time to look ahead and take action. We must promote the final push for the Millennium Development Goals, finalise a new sustainable development agenda and agree a far-reaching deal to tackle climate change.

It is little wonder the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has said this not just another year but a chance to change the course of history.

As you heard, I used to be the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, so forgive me if I tell you a little story about my old boss.

Last November, the Secretary-General visited Vienna. You may have seen at the time that he made quite a splash when he met Eurovision Song Contest winner Conchita Wurst, thanks to the hard work of my team in the UN Information Service. Well, the Secretary-General also met my team a bit later. There was less of a splash and no singing but we got him to sign a poster with some important words in English and the languages of the countries we serve - German, Slovak, Slovenian and Hungarian.

Mi, az Egyesült Nemzetek népei.

We the peoples.

Don't ask me to try the other languages as well...

Next month, on 26 June, we will mark and celebrate 70 years since the signing of the UN Charter, which guides all our actions and begins, of course, with the words "We the peoples".

It begins that way because that is precisely what the United Nations is about.

"We the peoples" were able to bring peace to many places.

Through diplomatic efforts, 69 peacekeeping operations and several peacebuilding missions, a large number of countries emerged from conflict over the past 70 years, including Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Namibia and Tajikistan.

With the Millennium Development Goals, "we the peoples" were able to lift 700 million people out of extreme poverty and cut the number of people suffering from hunger nearly by half.

"We the peoples" also agreed on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative has helped galvanise efforts in this area. As a result, in South Sudan, for example, the United Nations opened the gates of its peacekeeping bases to protect civilians caught in conflict. This action alone saved tens of thousands of lives.

"We the peoples" have helped fund the World Food Programme, which together with the Food and Agriculture Organization, feeds 80 million people every year and works to help prevent hunger in the future.

Over the past decades, the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, took care of tens of millions of refugees around the globe, safeguarding their rights and well-being.

"We the peoples" also concluded numerous treaties regulating topics as diverse as outer space, maritime security and trade.

All this was possible because it was done jointly. Because it was done together. Hungary, through its 60 years of membership, has played its part too. And so has its civil society through the Hungarian UN Association.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to be frank with you.

This is also a time when we evaluate our shortcomings and learn from mistakes.

We remember Rwanda. We remember Srebrenica. We remember Sri Lanka. We recognize past failures and have taken action to prevent similar future disasters. As we all know, the United Nations grew from the ashes of World War Two. There has been no global conflict since then. But neither has there been global peace.

Indeed, the number of simultaneous conflicts we face today is truly alarming.

Syria's abortive Arab Spring was followed by four dark Arab winters with little hope for change, despite renewed efforts, including this week in Geneva.

And darkness not just in Syria.

Of course, Ukraine is a major preoccupation in this region.

Yemen, Libya, South Sudan, Mali, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the list goes on and looms large. People are dying. People are going hungry. People are on the move. They all need our attention.

Islamic State or Daesh, Boko Haram, Al Shabab, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups grab headlines and take lives with shocking brutality.

The lack of rule of law in many countries has made it easier for such groups to operate and expand.

Crises come in many forms. Having successfully cut HIV rates in Sub-Saharan Africa and averted millions of deaths from malaria, we faced a new health crisis last year in West Africa.

Close to 11,000 people have died from the deadly Ebola virus. Some have argued, indeed many have argued, the initial international response was slow and inadequate. The world is fully engaged now, and the results are striking; a good example of what can be achieved when the international community works together.

The rate of new infections has declined. But reaching zero is, of course, the toughest part. And we must help rebuild not just lives but economies.

The Ebola crisis, the tragedy of migrants dying at sea, including this week yet again, the international drug trade, organized crime and the rise of violent extremism all show the urgent need for a collective response, for a unity of purpose.

That is why 2015 is a time for global action, and why we must seize the chance to change the course of history.

First, in September in New York, Member States are set to adopt a sustainable development agenda that will carry on and expand the work of the Millennium Development Goals.

Thanks to the Millennium Development Goals, the world has reduced extreme poverty by half and more than two billion people gained access to improved drinking water.

Yet every four seconds a child dies of preventable causes and there are still 900 million people suffering from chronic hunger.

The Sustainable Development Goals must address, will address, this and much more.

The process to map out these goals has gathered input from Member States, civil society and the private sector.

Indeed it was the then Hungarian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York, Ambassador Csaba Kőrösi, who along with the Kenyan Permanent Representative co-chaired the discussions among Member States.

The new goals will be universal.

That brings me to the second universal agreement Member States are working towards in Paris in December; a strong, meaningful climate deal. If we do not get this right, succeeding generations will not ask about the scourge of war but why we did not do what we could to tackle climate change.

These are the main priorities of the United Nations and of the Secretary-General.

Much work is also being done on the fight against terrorism, advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, humanitarian assistance and disaster reduction.

Additionally, the Secretary-General has ordered a review of UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

The days when blue helmets observed a ceasefire between former adversaries largely belong to the past.

Today's UN peacekeepers are often deployed where there is no peace to keep, and where they face terrorist attacks and yet nonetheless protect civilians. They have to be peace-keepers, peace-makers and peace-builders all at once.

Which brings me back to my old boss.

The Secretary-General was in Paris last week.

Addressing Sciences Po University, he said the United Nations used to cope with a handful of crises at once. No longer. As he put it, there are only a limited number of fire engines, and there are more fires than trucks.

We all understand this instinctively.

The United Nations will continue to work with Member States and civil society to help extinguish the many fires of our time and prevent new flames from igniting.

We must adapt. We must be flexible. We need innovation and we must be resilient.

A strong United Nations for a better world.

This is a year for global action. A year for unity, solidarity and compassion, as “we the peoples” seek to build a future of dignity for all.

Thank you.

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